



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by OSCE Head of Mission to Moldova, Ambassador William Hill

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 3, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Hill back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his report on recent developments in Moldova.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot overemphasize the importance of an election campaign and vote for the March 6 parliamentary elections in Moldova that meet international democratic standards. The United States is promoting this objective through bilateral diplomatic initiatives and assistance, support for civil society and democratic institutions, and provision of observers to the ODIHR monitoring mission.

With the exception of irregularities noted during the 2003 local elections, Moldova has a generally good record of holding elections free of fraud or other serious problems. We urge the Moldovan authorities and the Central Election Commission to do everything they can to ensure that the March elections meet international democratic standards. I would just mention that Ambassador Minikes is in Chisinau today conveying this message.

Turning to last week's consultations in Odesa between the mediators and the parties to the Transnistria conflict, we share Ambassador Hill's frustration over the unexplained, and in our view inexcusable, absence of the chief Transnistrian negotiator. The Transnistrian side showed no will to negotiate seriously in 2004, and the level of Tiraspol's representation at these first consultations of 2005 conveys a continued lack of serious intent. The construction by Transnistrian authorities of a new border guard gate near the Moldovan village of Dorotscaia that Ambassador Hill has just reported on is another sign of a lack of good will.

We would like to commend Ukraine for hosting last week's consultations, and for remaining engaged as a mediator in the process. We welcome reports that Ukraine is now tightening control of goods transiting Ukrainian territory bound for Transnistria. If continued, this would be an important step toward respecting the 2003 Moldova-Ukraine Customs Protocol.

Along these same lines, we hope that the new government in Kiev will give positive consideration to the proposal to allow international border and customs monitors to operate along the Moldova-Ukraine border.

The United States' position on the Transnistria conflict remains firm: we support a peacefully negotiated settlement that respects Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity. With this in mind, we see great merit in the mediators' and the sides' giving careful consideration to the OSCE Mission's proposed confidence- and security-building measures. These measures can

greatly reduce the ongoing tensions in the region and bring important economic and security benefits to both sides.

On February 1, the Moldovan government issued a statement expressing concern over reports of military movements by Transnistrian authorities, as well as an alleged propaganda campaign aimed at convincing residents of the region that Moldovan forces pose an imminent threat. While at this time we cannot independently verify these reports, we are certainly concerned about any potential actions that can further destabilize an already tense situation, and which could disrupt the democratic process in Moldova. We look forward to further reports on this matter by the OSCE Mission.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to reiterate what Secretary of State Powell stated at the OSCE Ministerial in Sofia in December: over five years have passed since the Russian Federation committed to withdrawing its military forces from Moldovan territory. In 2004 there was barely any movement toward fulfillment of that Istanbul summit commitment. We once again call on Russia to resume the withdrawal of forces that was suspended last year. There is no reason why a resumption of the withdrawal process needs to wait for progress in the political settlement arena.

I would also like to touch on the OSCE Mission's continued good work in all three dimensions. In particular, I want to highlight the ongoing importance that we attach to combating trafficking in human beings in Moldova. This week the OSCE Mission initiated a two-week training course for Moldovan police on investigation techniques to combat human trafficking. We commend the Mission for this initiative. The United States hopes that the witness protection program developed by the Mission for trafficking victims and their relatives will continue to receive priority attention from the government.

Mr. Chairman, this is a crucial period for Moldova. Parliamentary elections are a little over a month away. New leaders have been elected in two of Moldova's neighboring states, Ukraine and Romania. It is the sincere hope of the United States that democratic elections will take place on March 6, and that soon thereafter, whoever Moldova's leaders will be, negotiations toward a settlement of the Transnistria conflict will resume in earnest. The United States stands by to offer its support and assistance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.